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1964/07/02

M:WJJorden:mm

CONFIDENTIAL

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

# Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: July 2, 1964

SUBJECT: Viet-Nam

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY COY DATE 1/29/87
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PARTICIPANTS: Gov. W. Averell Harriman
General Paul Harkins
Amb. Llewellyn E. Thompson
Mr. Mike Forrestal
Mr. William Jorden

COPIES TO:

General Harkins, recently returned from Viet-Nam, was a luncheon guest in Governor Harriman's office on Thursday, July 2, 1964. The luncheon lasted from 12:30 p.m. to 1:20 p.m.

The main points covered in General Harkins' comments were:

1. There has been a notable improvement in the situation in Viet-Nam. Harkins believes the situation now has returned to about the level prevailing one year ago. He noted a serious deterioration as a result of the two coups but feels the setbacks have now been overcome.

2. Among elements in the new situation which he found encouraging, Harkins cited improved morale among GVN forces, the fact that the Vietnamese are accepting advice from Americans far more readily, and GVN units are now engaged in frequent night fighting against the Viet Cong. He said that U.S. advisers in the provinces were of high quality and that they were establishing new bonds of confidence with their Vietnamese counterparts.

3.

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3. Harkins has a fairly low opinion of General Minh, thinks he is weak and indecisive. Described him as "just sitting around" and not able to make up his mind what to do. Also, as feeling sorry for himself. Says arrest of the other generals (Kim, Don, Dinh, etc.) was a blow to Minh. Harkins said he had long been trying to encourage Minh to get out into the country and to use his prestige in the interest of the GVN cause. Said he was glad to hear that Minh is now beginning to get out.

4. On the generals, Harkins admitted that the arrest of Kim, Don, etc. was bad for morale. Said the wives of some felt the U.S. had let them down and had done little to secure their release. He regarded Kim as the brightest of the group and thought he might have been influenced by the French. Doubted Don was involved in anything. Said he understood General Dinh had become an alcoholic. Thought it best if these generals could be assigned abroad.

5. Harkins has a high opinion of General Khanh. Finds him energetic and forceful. Thinks he should get full backing. He doesn't see anyone who could do as well. Believes another coup would be a disaster.

6. Harkins spoke disparagingly of the Saigon "rumor mill". He said the politicians were deeply divided among themselves and that there were "a thousand factions". He could see no useful or hopeful elements among the civilians.

7. Harkins noted the increased use of indiscriminate terror by the Viet Cong. Said he was surprised to see this technique being used against women and children. Could not explain why the VC were using these tactics because it was alienating the population. Noted that much of the terror was aimed at civilian officials in the villages and districts.

8. Harkins said the montagnard were being resettled on a large scale. He used the figure 500,000. Had no knowledge of any mass defections on the part of the hill tribes.



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tribes. Spoke of the montagnard as a useful asset, particularly in cross-border operations.

9. Harkins doubted the Viet Cong had the potential for splitting Viet-Nam in the Quang Ngai or other highland areas. Said this was something President Diem had always worried about. Admitted it might be done by a mass intrusion of forces from North Viet-Nam but said that would be a different war.

10. Harkins agreed with Khanh's view that large-scale attacks on the North should not be attempted until the situation was under better control in the South. Said Khanh wants first to develop a secure base for operations, starting with the provinces around Saigon. He did not have the resources to do both--strengthen his home base and hit the North on a large scale.

11. Harkins spoke approvingly, however, of small hit-and-run raids on specific targets in North Viet-Nam. He said this effort was beginning to pay off. Said that teams trained earlier for this effort were nearly worthless--poor morale, poor quality leadership. He said the whole program had been revamped and that a strenuous retraining effort had been carried out. He thought the present resources were able, well-led, and had high morale.

12. Harkins said there was no quick easy answer to the Viet-Nam problem. He said it was going to be a long, hard fight. Said that we must learn patience and be willing to accept, as the Communists are, that we are in for a long tough struggle for which there are no short-cuts.



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